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	RESEARCH ARTICLE 	
	The National School and the Teaching of the Mother Tongue in Azerbaijan at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: A Historical and Pedagogical Analysis	
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Abstract This article examines the educational and pedagogical ideas of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, one of the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, with particular emphasis on his views concerning the national school, mother-tongue instruction, teacher training, religious education, and the broader social role of educational institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century. Drawing on Rasulzade’s publicistic articles published primarily in <i>Açıq Söz</i> and <i>İqbal</i> , the study analyzes how he interpreted the relationship between education, national identity, state policy, and cultural development under the conditions of Tsarist imperial rule. The article demonstrates that Rasulzade regarded education as one of the principal foundations of national survival and progress. According to his pedagogical thought, schools for Azerbaijani children and youth should be organized in the national language, shaped by the national spirit, informed by the religious and moral values of the people, and open to the teaching of secular sciences, history, and modern knowledge. He argued that such a system required not only well-designed curricula but also qualified teachers capable of implementing them in a way that combined intellectual progress with cultural continuity. Particular attention is given to Rasulzade’s analysis of teacher-training institutions, mosque schools, madrasas, educational societies, and the proposed reform of religious education. The study shows that he considered the imperial educational policy toward Azerbaijani Muslims to be deeply contradictory and unjust, since it restricted mother-tongue education, limited national development, and often subordinated pedagogical considerations to political interests. At the same time, his writings reveal a clear and constructive alternative: the establishment of national schools and seminaries capable of educating a generation that would be knowledgeable, morally grounded, socially conscious, and loyal to its language, culture, and homeland. The article concludes that Rasulzade’s educational ideas remain relevant for contemporary debates on language policy, teacher education, national curriculum development, and the role of schooling in preserving cultural identity while participating in modern global progress.		
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Introduction

The establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28, 1918, the first independent democratic state in the East, marked an important turning point in the political, cultural, and educational history of Azerbaijan. Among the prominent figures who contributed significantly to the formation of this state was Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, an outstanding political leader, publicist, statesman, and intellectual. Rasulzade's writings on education and schooling provide valuable insights into the historical development of Azerbaijani education and illuminate several important issues related to the national school system.

Through the analysis of Rasulzade's publicistic articles, it becomes possible to revisit the complex historical realities of the early twentieth century and clarify important aspects of the development of national education. His works not only reflect the conditions of the education system of that period but also reveal the intellectual efforts made to reform and modernize education in accordance with national interests and contemporary social needs. A careful examination of Rasulzade's writings demonstrates that he possessed a deep and comprehensive understanding of the educational system of his time. He clearly identified its shortcomings and sought effective solutions to address them. As a patriotic intellectual devoted to the advancement of his nation, Rasulzade did not hesitate to express critical views about existing educational policies despite the severe censorship imposed by the political regime of the Russian Empire.

Rasulzade's Critique of the Educational System

In his series of articles titled "School and Madrasa", Rasulzade discussed the state of Muslim education within the Russian Empire. He noted that Muslims in Russia traditionally received education in institutions associated with mosques, commonly known as mosque schools and madrasas. These institutions functioned similarly to church schools in non-Muslim communities and were considered one of the few national privileges that Muslims were able to preserve during the reign of Catherine the Great.

Although mosque schools and madrasas were formally regarded as independent national educational institutions and were not fully integrated into the general state educational system, their curriculum remained extremely limited due to government restrictions. The subjects permitted for instruction were largely confined to religious and linguistic studies. Students were primarily taught the mother tongue, Islamic religious studies, and recitation of the Qur'an, while in madrasas additional instruction was provided in Arabic, Persian, and general theological disciplines necessary for religious scholars and clergy.

However, the teaching of other subjects, particularly those related to modern sciences and secular knowledge, was not permitted by the authorities. Despite these limitations, Rasulzade emphasized that mosque schools possessed one important advantage: they represented the most natural form of national education, rooted in the cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions of the local population.

Analysis of Educational Structure and Pedagogical Approaches

Rasulzade carefully analyzed the organizational structure, educational content, form, and character of the schools operating during that period. In his writings, he frequently raised a fundamental pedagogical question: "What will be the ultimate result of the education provided in these institutions?"

Starting from this question, he logically examined the goals and objectives that schools should pursue and attempted to classify them systematically. He also analyzed the teaching methods applied in schools and evaluated them in light of the social and intellectual demands of the era.

In Rasulzade's view, the relationship between state, nation, and school represented a complex and often contradictory interaction. He believed that the nature of this interaction would inevitably influence the future development of society and the national consciousness of the people. Therefore, he emphasized the necessity of anticipating potential problems in advance and developing appropriate solutions.

Advocacy for Mother Tongue Education

One of the central issues addressed by Rasulzade was the importance of education in the native language. Referring to discussions held at the conference of educational administrators in Petrograd, he highlighted the importance of recognizing the educational rights of non-Russian peoples within the empire.

Rasulzade wrote that among the urgent issues discussed at this conference was the need to pay attention to schools belonging to non-Russian nationalities and to adopt the mother tongue of the population as the language of instruction in those schools. In addition, he advocated for educational reforms in Muslim schools and madrasas so that their teaching could be modernized and aligned with contemporary educational standards.

According to Rasulzade, as long as the ideology of “true Russian nationalism” dominated the political environment in Petrograd, the languages and religious traditions of non-Russian peoples remained suppressed alongside their intellectual and cultural development. However, when new political ideas promoting greater freedom in science and education began to influence the government, both Russian and non-Russian educational institutions experienced a certain degree of relief from the pressures of assimilationist policies.

Educational Reforms and New Opportunities

Rasulzade also discussed the changes that occurred in the Russian educational administration following the appointment of a new Minister of Education, Ignatyev, who replaced the former minister Kasvin. Although Rasulzade did not portray Ignatyev as a revolutionary reformer capable of creating a complete “spring of education,” he nevertheless regarded the activities of the educational administration under his leadership as a sign of positive change.

He referred to the frequent meetings of educational administrators, the gatherings of geography teachers, and the assemblies of historians and social scientists as evidence that educational life was gradually becoming more active and dynamic. These developments suggested that the empty promises of the previous ministerial administration were finally being replaced by concrete initiatives.

Ignatyev, who had received a European education and was known for his progressive approach to governance, chaired discussions in Petrograd where several important issues were raised. Among them was the recognition of the educational needs of non-Russian nationalities and the acceptance of native languages as the medium of instruction in their schools. Additionally, it was proposed that the educational process in Muslim schools and madrasas should be reformed and organized according to a systematic educational framework similar to that applied in other schools within the empire.

These developments provided new hope for those advocating the creation of national schools. Rasulzade believed that such reforms could help remove the obstacles that had long hindered efforts to establish national educational institutions and could encourage new initiatives aimed at developing national education.

Teacher Training and the Need for Educational Institutions

One of the most significant issues raised by Rasulzade concerned the shortage of qualified teachers for Muslim schools. He welcomed the decision of the new educational authorities to allow the establishment of a teacher training institute (Darülmüəllimin) in Baku to prepare teachers for Russian-Muslim schools.

According to Rasulzade, the idea of establishing such an institution had existed for a long time. As early as 1905–1906, this issue had been seriously discussed and proposals had been submitted to the government. Although public confidence in Russian-Muslim schools was steadily increasing, the government had failed to take adequate measures to support teacher training.

At that time, the only institutions available for training Muslim teachers were the Muslim department of the Gori Teachers’ Seminary and a teacher training institute in Yerevan. These institutions were insufficient to meet the growing demand for teachers among the Muslim population of the Caucasus. If the qualifications of teachers working in the numerous primary schools opened in cities and villages by organizations such as the Nashri-Maarif Society and other educational associations had been examined, the urgent need for a teacher training institute in Baku would have become immediately evident.

For Rasulzade, the establishment of such institutions was essential for the national development of the Azerbaijani people. He emphasized that decisions concerning the creation of teacher training institutes should not be delayed even for a moment, as the educational future of the nation depended on them.

Metaphorical Critique of Russian Educational Policy

Rasulzade sometimes expressed his criticism of Russian educational policy through satirical metaphors. In one of his writings, he compared Russian educational policy to the biblical story of Pharaoh’s dream, in which seven lean cows devour seven fat cows, symbolizing years of prosperity followed by years of famine.

According to Rasulzade, Russian education had experienced a similar pattern. There had once been prosperous years during which numerous schools and universities were established. However, later political policies—represented metaphorically by the “lean cows”—began to destroy the achievements of those prosperous years.

Nevertheless, Rasulzade believed that under the new educational administration there were signs that these destructive policies were gradually losing influence. The decision to establish a teacher training institute in Baku was seen as an important step toward revitalizing education among the Muslim population of the Caucasus.

Conclusion

The educational ideas expressed by Mahammad Amin Rasulzade reflect the broader intellectual struggle for national awakening and modernization in Azerbaijan during the early twentieth century. His writings reveal a deep concern for the development of national education, the preservation of cultural identity, and the importance of teaching in the mother tongue.

Rasulzade's analysis of the educational system highlighted both the limitations imposed by imperial policies and the opportunities created by progressive reforms. By advocating for national schools, modern curricula, and teacher training institutions, he contributed significantly to the conceptual foundations of the Azerbaijani national education system.

The ideas articulated in his publicistic works continue to hold relevance today, as they emphasize the importance of education as a key factor in national development, cultural preservation, and the formation of an enlightened and conscious society.

Educational Institutions, Teacher Training, and Mother-Tongue Instruction in the Pedagogical Thought of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade

In one of his later articles, written after initially welcoming the decision to establish a teacher-training institute in Baku, Mahammad Amin Rasulzade revisited the issue with a more critical perspective. He noted that after the head of the school department of the Baku City Duma, Ionesyan, visited Tiflis and held discussions with the Caucasian educational authorities, it became clear that the newly planned *darülmüəllimin* (teacher training institute) would not exclusively serve the needs of Russian-Muslim schools, as previously reported in the press. Instead, it was decided that the institution would train teachers for both Russian-Muslim and Russian-Armenian schools (Rasulzade, 1915).

This decision meant that the Baku teacher-training institute would include both Muslim and Armenian departments. Although Rasulzade acknowledged that such a joint institution could address only a small portion of the urgent demand for qualified teachers, he nevertheless argued that even such limited assistance should not be rejected outright. In his view, the severe shortage of trained educators in Muslim schools required every possible initiative to be pursued, even if the solution offered by the authorities remained partial and inadequate (Rasulzade, 1915, 1916).

Through his journalistic writings, Rasulzade clearly demonstrated how educational policies introduced by the imperial administration often underwent modification at the local level, frequently resulting in outcomes that diverged from the original expectations of the Muslim population. His observations revealed the complex interaction between imperial educational policy, local administrative practices, and the aspirations of national intellectuals seeking to establish a modern educational system for their people.

Analysis of Educational Institutions and Educational Structure

Beyond administrative and financial problems associated with educational institutions, Rasulzade devoted considerable attention to analyzing curricula, teaching methods, and the broader social purpose of education. His writings demonstrate that he approached the question of education not merely as an institutional issue but as a fundamental component of national development and cultural survival (Balayev, 2009; Ahmadov, 2006).

A review of Rasulzade's analyses reveals that the educational system of the period could be divided into several main types of institutions:

1. Teacher training institutes (*Darülmüəllimin* or seminaries)
2. Russian-Muslim schools (primary and secondary schools)
3. Government-established mosque-oriented schools
4. Traditional mosque schools and madrasas

Each of these institutions played a different role within the educational landscape of the Caucasus during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Teacher Training Institutes (*Darülmüəllimin*)

Teacher training institutes were educational institutions established by the government to prepare teachers and educators for national schools. Among the most prominent examples were the Gori Teachers' Seminary and the Yerevan Teacher Training Institute, both of which served Muslim populations of the Caucasus (Ahmadov, 2006).

However, Rasulzade expressed concern about the effectiveness of these institutions in preparing teachers capable of working in national schools. According to him, graduates of these seminaries often lacked sufficient knowledge of the Turkish (Azerbaijani) language, as well as familiarity with Muslim culture, social life, and intellectual traditions. As a result, many seminarists were unable to perform effectively as teachers within Muslim communities (Rasulzade, 1915).

Rasulzade emphasized that a genuine national teacher must possess not only professional pedagogical training but also a deep understanding of the language, culture, and worldview of the people they serve. Without such cultural competence, the teacher would remain disconnected from the students and incapable of instilling a meaningful sense of national identity.

Russian-Muslim Schools

Another important category of educational institutions consisted of Russian-Muslim schools, which included both primary (ibtidai) and secondary (edadi) levels. These schools were established to provide elementary education among Muslim communities within the Russian Empire (Isaxanli, 2018).

According to Rasulzade, these schools should fulfill two essential educational functions:

1. Teaching the state language, thereby cultivating civic awareness and enabling students to participate in the administrative and political life of the state.
2. Teaching the national language, thereby fostering national identity, cultural consciousness, and religious values.

For Rasulzade, the role of the teacher in such institutions was particularly crucial. He argued that a teacher should not merely transmit academic knowledge or apply modern teaching techniques. Instead, teachers should prepare students to become individuals who love their country, nation, language, and religion, while also developing a sense of civic responsibility toward the state in which they live (Rasulzade, 1916).

In other words, primary schools for Muslim communities should cultivate three fundamental pillars of a civilized social life: national identity, moral integrity, and social organization. Teachers must therefore understand the historical traditions, cultural practices, and religious values of their society in order to provide a meaningful national education.

A teacher unfamiliar with the religious needs of the community or alienated from the everyday life and customs of the people could neither develop national consciousness among students nor provide the desired moral and cultural upbringing (Rasulzade, 1915).

Expansion of Primary Schools

Rasulzade strongly believed that the expansion of primary education was one of the most urgent requirements for the development of the nation. He argued that the number of primary schools should increase and that their educational programs should be organized in accordance with the spirit, traditions, and social customs of the people (Rasulzade, 1915).

In addition to expanding the number of schools, he proposed several important reforms:

- the revision and modernization of school curricula,
- the dissemination of new educational programs,
- the establishment of cooperation between schools and various educational societies respected within local communities.

Such initiatives, in his view, would strengthen the connection between educational institutions and the broader society while ensuring that schools served the real needs of the population.

Government-Established Mosque Schools

Rasulzade also discussed government-established schools in Tiflis known as “Ali” and “Omar” schools, which operated under the supervision of the Sheikh-ul-Islam and the Mufti. Although these institutions were presented as educational initiatives designed to serve Muslim communities, Rasulzade criticized them sharply.

According to him, the weakness of these schools lay not only in their poor quality of instruction but also in their potential to divide a people united by language, religion, and cultural heritage. He believed that such institutions could unintentionally contribute to fragmentation rather than to the intellectual development of the Muslim population (Balayev, 2009).

Mosque Schools and Madrasas

Another category of educational institutions consisted of traditional mosque schools and madrasas, which operated independently of the state educational system. Rasulzade acknowledged that these institutions had often been criticized by reformers who regarded them as centers of intellectual stagnation and backwardness.

However, he also warned that dismissing these institutions entirely would be a mistake. Despite their shortcomings, mosque schools and madrasas represented indigenous educational institutions deeply rooted in the cultural and religious life of the community (Rasulzade, 1916).

Rasulzade pointed to the example of Muslim communities in the Volga region, particularly the Tatars, who had approached traditional educational institutions with greater seriousness. Rather than abandoning them, they introduced Usul-i Jadid (New Method) reforms that incorporated modern teaching techniques, instruction in the mother tongue, and basic secular sciences into the traditional curriculum (Ahmadov, 2006).

This example demonstrated that traditional educational institutions could be modernized and transformed into effective national schools if appropriate reforms were introduced.

The Language of Instruction and Imperial Educational Policy

A central theme in Rasulzade's writings was the language of instruction. He strongly criticized the policies of the imperial authorities, who often claimed to support educational development while simultaneously restricting the use of native languages in schools.

In his view, the authorities frequently accused local educational initiatives of promoting Pan-Turkism or political nationalism, even when their primary objective was simply to provide education in the mother tongue (Rasulzade, 1916).

Rasulzade rejected these accusations and argued that the linguistic similarities between the Ottoman Turkish literary language and Azerbaijani Turkish should not be interpreted as a political threat. Instead, he emphasized that these languages represented closely related branches of a broader Turkic linguistic tradition.

He further criticized laws that prohibited instruction in the mother tongue for Muslims throughout Transcaucasia and Dagestan, describing such restrictions as unjustified and harmful to educational development.

According to Rasulzade, Azerbaijani Turkish functioned as a common language of communication across the region. In many parts of the Caucasus and Dagestan, where numerous small ethnic groups spoke mutually unintelligible dialects, Azerbaijani Turkish served as a practical lingua franca facilitating communication among different communities (Isaxanli, 2018).

For this reason, he argued that conducting education in this language was not the result of political coercion but rather a natural response to the social and cultural realities of the region.

Language and National Development

For Rasulzade, language represented one of the most fundamental elements of national identity and intellectual development. He believed that the suppression of a people's native language within the educational system inevitably hindered their cultural and social progress.

Educational policy, therefore, was never neutral. The language chosen as the medium of instruction reflected broader political and ideological objectives. In colonial contexts, the replacement of the native language with the dominant imperial language often functioned as a strategy for weakening national consciousness and consolidating imperial authority (Balayev, 2009).

Through his writings, Rasulzade repeatedly emphasized that genuine educational reform required the recognition of the mother tongue as the primary language of instruction, accompanied by the development of modern curricula and teacher training institutions capable of supporting national schools.

In this sense, Rasulzade's educational thought represented an important intellectual foundation for the later development of the national education system of Azerbaijan.

Government Educational Reform Projects, National Schools, and the Question of Mother-Tongue Instruction in the Thought of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade

Among the educational initiatives discussed by Mahammad Amin Rasulzade in his journalistic writings were the new schools that the government proposed to establish for Muslim communities in the Caucasus. These plans included, first, the opening of a darülmüellimin in Baku, an institution intended to train teachers and educators for schools, and second, the reorganization of the so-called "Ali" and "Omar" higher primary schools, which were to be elevated from ordinary primary schools to the level of advanced primary institutions. In addition, these schools were expected to include special courses for the preparation of teachers and religious functionaries, with the declared purpose of training what might be called "enlightened mollahs" (Rasulzade, 1916).

Rasulzade explained that, according to the reform publicly announced to society, the mosque schools in Tiflis functioning under the names "Ali" and "Omar" would be improved and brought closer to the level of a madrasa. In

these special institutions, teaching was to be conducted in three languages: Russian, Arabic, and Turkish. Under the official plan, all general subjects would be taught in Russian, while Sharia and the religious sciences associated with it would be taught in Arabic. Rasulgade approached this arrangement critically, arguing that such a structure did not genuinely serve the educational and cultural needs of the Muslim population. In his view, if education were truly intended for the moral and intellectual benefit of the people, then the use of the mother tongue in at least a significant portion of instruction should have been regarded as both natural and necessary (Rasulgade, 1916).

He raised an especially important pedagogical and political question: if Arabic was already included in the curriculum for the memorization of ritual prayers and certain religious formulas, why should the broader religious sciences—such as *fiqh*, *kalam*, and *tafsir*—also be taught in Arabic rather than in a language understandable to students? Rasulgade argued that instead of teaching these subjects first in Arabic and then translating them separately into Turkish for Turkic students and into Russian for non-Turkic Muslim students, it would be far more logical and educationally effective to provide direct instruction in a language that students could actually understand. From the standpoint of pedagogy, this was a matter of clarity, efficiency, and meaningful learning; from the standpoint of national development, it was also a matter of cultural dignity and linguistic rights (Rasulgade, 1916).

Rasulgade illustrated the impracticality of the proposed arrangement through a concrete classroom example. If, in a single classroom, the teacher first explained a point of Islamic jurisprudence in Arabic and then translated it into Turkish for the majority of students and into Russian for other Muslim groups such as Lezgins, Ossetians, or Chechens, the process would become both cumbersome and pedagogically weak. Such a model would require a teacher who was not only fully competent in the religious sciences but also equally fluent in Arabic, Turkish, and Russian. Rasulgade's criticism here was not limited to linguistic inconvenience. Rather, it reflected his broader conviction that education should be organized according to the natural linguistic and cultural environment of the learner, not according to bureaucratic formulas imposed from above (Rasulgade, 1916; Ahmadov, 2006).

At this point, Rasulgade appeared in the press not only as a courageous publicist capable of criticizing educational policy during a politically difficult period, but also as an intellectual who understood the wider implications of each official decision. He recognized that educational reforms were never merely technical matters; they were always connected to broader ideological aims and could shape the future of the people. This explains why some parts of his writings reportedly did not pass censorship intact and were removed from publication. His journalism thus served both as criticism and as public enlightenment, warning society about the long-term consequences of educational policies formulated under imperial rule (Chamanzaminli, 2005; Rasulgade, 1915a, 1916).

One of the most striking questions Rasulgade posed concerned the contradiction within imperial policy itself. If the Tsarist state claimed to value unity and administrative coherence, why did it divide the schools of a single Muslim population into separate institutions identified as “Ali” and “Omar”, that is, along sectarian lines associated with the Sheikh-ul-Islam and the Mufti? Why was it considered appropriate to transform these already existing sectarian schools in Tiflis into higher primary institutions instead of creating broader, unified schools serving the common educational needs of the Muslim population? For Rasulgade, this policy could not be explained on purely educational grounds. Rather, it suggested that sectarian distinctions were being preserved, and perhaps even institutionally reinforced, in ways that hindered the formation of broader educational and cultural unity among Muslims in the region (Rasulgade, 1916).

In this context, Rasulgade emphasized that the Muslims of Transcaucasia, with only minor exceptions, belonged to a common civilizational and cultural sphere and sought to live in unity and cultural solidarity. He argued that overcoming sectarian differences among Muslims and promoting educational and social cohesion would not damage the state. On the contrary, such unity could contribute positively to social order and the moral development of the population. Yet, according to him, the government often interpreted any effort to bring Sunni and Shi'i Muslims closer together as though it concealed a political agenda hostile to the state. Rasulgade rejected this suspicion as unjustified. He argued that every major religion has historically developed different schools of thought and sects, and that such differentiation is a natural consequence of historical development, intellectual debate, and the evolving life of societies. The real problem, in his analysis, emerged when states and ruling powers instrumentalized these differences for purposes of administration and control, granting preference to one group over another and thereby fostering distrust, rivalry, and division over time (Rasulgade, 1916).

This argument is significant because it shows that Rasulgade did not discuss schooling in isolation. He understood the school as an institution deeply embedded in the political and social order. In his view, when the state used education to preserve division rather than to foster enlightenment, schools ceased to be instruments of progress and became instead instruments of policy. Therefore, his criticism of the “Ali” and “Omar” school model extended beyond curriculum design to encompass a broader critique of how imperial governance approached Muslim society. He believed that a truly modern and constructive educational policy would have aimed at reducing sectarian barriers, strengthening literacy and pedagogical competence, and building shared civic and national consciousness rather than perpetuating fragmentation (Ahmadov, 2006; Rasulgade, 1916).

National Teacher-Training Institutes and National Schools

In contrast to official reform projects, Rasulgade gave special importance to the idea of national *darülmüallimins* (teacher-training seminaries) and national schools, institutions that Azerbaijani intellectuals and patriots had long desired to establish. These schools, according to him, had been repeatedly proposed by local educated circles and public associations, which prepared programs and submitted them to the authorities. The purpose of such schools was clear: to create a system of education in which Azerbaijani children and youth would be taught in their national language, in a national spirit, by teachers who were not only professionally qualified but also knowledgeable about the religious beliefs, traditions, and moral values of the people, while at the same time capable of teaching secular sciences and history (Rasulgade, 1915b, 1915c, 1916).

For Rasulgade, this was not a utopian or romantic vision. It was a practical educational necessity. He repeatedly insisted that qualified intellectuals, capable teaching staff, and even the material resources needed for such institutions could be found if only the government refrained from creating obstacles. The problem, as he saw it, was not the absence of local will or local capacity; it was the political resistance of the authorities to the emergence of schools that would strengthen national identity and cultural autonomy. Thus, the struggle for national schools was not simply about pedagogy but also about the right of a people to educate its children in accordance with its own historical and cultural needs (Rasulgade, 1915b, 1915d, 1916).

Rasulgade wrote that at the beginning of the twentieth century Tsarist Russia sought to portray itself as a state supportive of freedom, enlightenment, and science. Yet in practice, contradictory decisions and restrictive policies prevented the broad spread of education that would encourage national consciousness, native-language development, and social progress among Muslims. He observed that the aspirations of Muslim educational societies in Baku for the establishment of national schools were frequently ridiculed or dismissed. In particular, he referred to the charter and proposals prepared by the religious and educational “Saadat” Society, which reportedly included goals such as reorganizing the madrasas of Baku according to the *Usul-i Jadid* method and establishing new religious schools, teacher-training institutions, and higher educational establishments suited to the needs of the time. These proposals, however, were treated by official educational authorities as dangerous fantasies rather than legitimate educational projects (Rasulgade, 1915d, 1916).

Rasulgade categorically rejected the characterization of such projects as mere “dreams.” On the contrary, he insisted that possessing private teacher-training seminaries, national schools, and the institutional means for educating one’s own people was a legitimate aspiration and a historical necessity. The educational future of a nation, in his understanding, could not depend indefinitely on externally designed institutions that neither reflected the language of the people nor corresponded to their cultural and intellectual life. Therefore, the call for national schools represented not fantasy but the rational expression of a people’s educational self-awareness (Rasulgade, 1915d; Ahmadov, 2006).

To strengthen his argument, Rasulgade pointed to neighboring Christian communities, especially Armenians, who by that time already possessed a well-developed network of church schools and religious teacher-training institutions. He noted that in these schools religious instruction was taught in Armenian, and that several other subjects—including Armenian history and other general disciplines—were likewise taught in the native language, whereas only subjects such as Russian history and geography were taught in Russian. Moreover, the administration and teaching staff of these schools remained largely under the control of the community itself. Rasulgade’s purpose in highlighting this example was not merely comparative description; he wished to demonstrate that the educational demands of Muslims were by no means extraordinary. Other communities within the empire had already secured institutional forms of schooling based on language, religion, and communal management, while Muslim communities were often denied equivalent opportunities (Rasulgade, 1916).

He also referred to the existence of several religious teacher-training institutions among neighboring communities in cities such as Yerevan, Shusha, Tiflis, Nakhchivan-on-Don, Shamakhi, and Astrakhan. By drawing attention to these schools, Rasulgade reinforced the argument that the Muslim demand for national educational institutions was grounded not in abstract ideology but in observable regional reality. If other communities were allowed to maintain and develop their own educational systems, why should Muslims be prevented from doing the same? This comparative line of argument was typical of Rasulgade’s method: he often used concrete educational examples to reveal the unequal nature of official policy (Rasulgade, 1916; Chamanzaminli, 2005).

The broader historical significance of this discussion becomes clearer when placed against the long educational history of Azerbaijani lands. As later scholars of Azerbaijani pedagogical history have noted, until the modern era many educational institutions in the region functioned under the authority of religious establishments, whether mosques or churches. Historical travel accounts and later pedagogical studies indicate that cities such as Tabriz and Shamakhi had for centuries possessed extensive networks of instructional institutions, including elementary teaching centers and madrasas. This historical memory is important because it shows that the demand for education in Azerbaijani society

was not new; rather, it had deep cultural roots. What was new in Rasulzade's period was the effort to modernize these institutions, connect them to the needs of the age, and reorganize them on national foundations without severing them from the linguistic and moral life of the people (Ahmadov, 2006; Aliyev, 2010).

Rasulzade was particularly troubled by the fact that in Azerbaijan not only were many scientific and secular subjects absent from Muslim schools, but even religious instruction itself was often not permitted in the mother tongue. This, in his view, sharply contrasted with the situation in non-Muslim schools, where native-language instruction in religion, history, and other disciplines was possible. Such inequality revealed the political nature of educational policy. The issue was not simply one of methodology, but of whose language, whose memory, and whose cultural continuity would be recognized as legitimate within the school system (Rasulzade, 1916; Isaxanli, 2018).

From Rasulzade's perspective, language lay at the heart of the entire question. The language of instruction was not an accidental technical matter; it was one of the central mechanisms through which imperial power could either suppress or enable a people's intellectual growth. Education conducted in a foreign or inaccessible language could produce alienation, weaken cultural continuity, and separate the child from the moral and historical world of the community. By contrast, education in the mother tongue could strengthen comprehension, encourage moral development, preserve historical consciousness, and create the foundations of a modern national culture. Thus, for Rasulzade, the struggle over school language was inseparable from the struggle over national existence itself (Rasulzade, 1915a, 1915b, 1916; Balayev, 2009).

In this sense, Rasulzade's writings constitute an important chapter in the history of Azerbaijani pedagogical thought. He did not advocate isolation from the wider world, nor did he reject the importance of learning the state language or acquiring modern knowledge. Rather, he argued for a balanced educational model in which civic competence, modern science, and broader literacy would develop alongside education rooted in the national language, historical memory, and cultural self-awareness of the people. His critique of official reform projects, his defense of national seminaries, and his insistence on mother-tongue instruction all point to a coherent pedagogical vision: a nation can only progress fully when its schools grow from its own linguistic, moral, and cultural soil (Ahmadov, 2006; Balayev, 2009; Rasulzade, 1915a, 1915b, 1915c, 1915d, 1916).

National School and the Teaching of the Mother Tongue at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Higher Religious Madrasa (Darülmüəllimin) and the Cultural Role of Educated Clergy

Another important educational institution discussed in the pedagogical and publicistic writings of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade was the higher religious madrasa or Darülmüəllimin, envisioned as an advanced institution for the education of clergy. In Rasulzade's view, the educational development of children and youth alone was not sufficient for the broader cultural progress of society. The intellectual and moral advancement of the adult population, especially those beyond school age, also depended heavily on the presence of educated and socially responsible religious figures. For this reason, the training, worldview, and personal qualities of mollahs occupied a place of great importance in his educational thought.

Rasulzade believed that after the Tsarist conquest, the traditional educational institutions that had once existed in Azerbaijani lands were severely weakened or destroyed. As a result, many mosque schools and madrasas gradually lost their earlier function as centers of knowledge and moral cultivation. Instead of contributing to enlightenment and progress, they often became disconnected from the intellectual needs of society. According to Rasulzade, one of the key reasons for this decline was the systematic marginalization of mother-tongue education, the restriction of even religious instruction to Arabic, and the placement of poorly educated and intellectually unprepared clergy in many mosque schools. In such circumstances, religious education risked becoming mechanical rather than meaningful, and educational institutions that should have elevated society instead contributed to stagnation (Rasulzade, 1915a, 1916).

Rasulzade described this crisis with remarkable clarity. He argued that a molla unfamiliar with modern sciences and detached from the changing intellectual world would naturally view new-method schools as rivals rather than partners in national development. Such individuals, shaped entirely by an old scholastic mentality, could not easily recognize that the modern world demanded broader intellectual horizons, critical thought, and familiarity with new philosophical and scientific currents. For this reason, he insisted that the scientific and intellectual modernization of clergy was not a marginal issue but a vital social necessity. Since religious leaders possessed strong influence among the people, their reform and education would directly affect the cultural and moral level of society as a whole.

To address this problem, Rasulzade argued for the establishment of an advanced religious teacher-training institution, built on sound principles, serious scholarship, and a curriculum reflecting the most urgent needs of the age. Such an institution, in his conception, would prepare not merely formal religious officials but genuine public educators—individuals capable of combining ethical authority, intellectual competence, and closeness to the people. Yet Rasulzade also emphasized that scholarship alone was not enough. Even the most learned and refined clergyman, he argued, could not fulfill his duties effectively if he lacked the trust, affection, and respect of the community. Therefore, a meaningful

spiritual bond had to exist between the clergy and the people. In his view, this required greater community participation in selecting religious figures and the restoration of Muslim charitable endowments (waqf) to community control so that they could support authentic educational and spiritual institutions rather than remain instruments of bureaucratic administration (Rasulzade, 1915a).

Educational Societies and Their Role in the Development of National Education

Alongside formal educational institutions, Rasulzade paid close attention to the role of educational societies operating in Baku and other urban centers. These organizations, such as Nashri-Maarif, Nijat, Safa, and Saadat, were among the most active social bodies working for the advancement of education among Muslims. Rasulzade regarded them as important mediators between society and the school, and he repeatedly called upon them to pay greater attention to the content of education, the methods of teaching, and the broader purpose of schooling.

According to Rasulzade, some of these societies, especially Nashri-Maarif and Nijat, had already developed an honorable and enlightened history of service. Their basic mission was to spread education, regulate the work of teaching and learning, and support the development of schools among Muslim communities. In particular, Rasulzade praised the efforts of the Nijat Society for having taken the significant step of convening a Congress of Caucasian Muslim Teachers, an event of major importance in the pedagogical life of the region. For this purpose, a special organizational commission had been established.

Table 1. Main Types of Educational Institutions Discussed in Rasulzade's Writings

No.	Type of institution	Historical description	Main function	Language of instruction	Rasulzade's evaluation	Main problems identified	Proposed direction of reform
1	Darülmüəllimin (Teacher Training Seminaries)	Government-established institutions intended to prepare teachers and educators for schools serving Muslim populations, such as the Gori Teachers' Seminary and similar structures in the Caucasus	Training of teachers for primary and secondary schools	Mostly influenced by Russian administrative policy; insufficient use of the native language	Rasulzade considered them necessary in principle, but inadequate in practice for national needs	Graduates often lacked sufficient command of Turkish/Azerbaijani, familiarity with Muslim social life, and sensitivity to national-cultural values	Establish national teacher-training institutions capable of preparing teachers in the mother tongue and in harmony with local cultural and moral realities
2	Russian-Muslim Schools	State-supported schools designed to provide elementary and intermediate education for Muslim communities	Primary and secondary education; literacy; basic civic and cultural formation	Russian for general subjects; limited Turkish and religious instruction	Considered useful if reformed properly; could become a bridge between civic competence and national identity	Weak national component, insufficient mother-tongue instruction, inadequate teacher preparation	Strengthen Azerbaijani/Turkish language teaching, make religious and moral education meaningful, and connect the curriculum to national life

3	“Ali” and “Omar” Higher Primary Schools	Sectarian mosque-oriented schools in Tiflis associated with the Sheikh-ul-Islam and Mufti structures; planned to be expanded into higher primary institutions	Higher elementary education; teacher and clergy-oriented preparation	Russian, Arabic, and Turkish under a complicated multilingual model	Critically assessed by Rasulgade as pedagogically weak and politically problematic	Artificial linguistic complexity, sectarian division, impractical curriculum, weak pedagogical coherence	Replace sectarian fragmentation with unified and nationally relevant schooling based on comprehensible instruction
4	Traditional Mosque Schools and Madrasas	Long-standing religious educational institutions rooted in local Muslim society	Religious education, literacy, preservation of tradition	Traditionally local and religious, but often reduced to Arabic ritual and rote learning	Rasulgade criticized their stagnation but did not reject them entirely; he saw them as reformable national institutions	Old methods, weak curriculum, poor teaching quality, distance from modern sciences	Reform through Usul-i Jadid methods, include mother-tongue education, basic sciences, and modern pedagogy
5	Ali Mədrəsəyi-Ruhaniyyə (Higher Religious Madrasa)	A proposed higher institution for the intellectual preparation of clergy and religious educators	Training educated mollahs and religious figures for society	Ideally should include accessible instruction rooted in the people's language and needs	Strongly supported by Rasulgade as socially necessary	Existing clergy often lacked modern knowledge, social authority based on competence, and pedagogical capacity	Establish a modern religious academy with a sound curriculum, intellectual depth, and strong social legitimacy
6	National Schools	Schools imagined and advocated by Azerbaijani intellectuals and patriots	Educating children and youth in the national language, spirit, and moral framework while teaching secular sciences	Azerbaijani Turkish / mother tongue as the central medium	Fully supported as the ideal form of education for national development	Blocked by imperial policy, lack of official support, and administrative barriers	Create full national schooling at primary and higher levels with qualified teachers, modern curricula, and community backing

Table 2. Rasulgade's Main Critiques of Imperial Educational Policy

No.	Area of critique	Rasulzade's position	Why he considered it problematic	Educational consequence	Broader national consequence
1	Restriction of mother-tongue instruction	He argued that education should be conducted in the native language of the people, especially in primary and cultural-religious contexts	Students cannot fully internalize knowledge when taught in linguistically distant forms; it weakens comprehension and identity	Shallow learning, weak literacy, disconnection from educational content	Weakening of national consciousness and cultural continuity
2	Teaching religious sciences in Arabic rather than an accessible language	He questioned the logic of teaching fiqh, kalam, and tafsir in Arabic when students needed translation anyway	Arabic may be relevant for ritual and terminology, but not as the exclusive teaching language for broad understanding	Mechanical learning instead of meaningful religious education	Alienation from both religion and native intellectual development
3	Sectarian division of schools into "Ali" and "Omar" categories	He saw this division as politically motivated and pedagogically harmful	A population with common language and cultural unity was being divided institutionally along sectarian lines	Fragmented educational structure and weak social cohesion	Reinforcement of internal divisions among Muslims
4	Lack of national teacher preparation	He believed that a true national teacher must know the people's language, religion, customs, and social psychology	Seminaries did not adequately prepare teachers for actual Muslim community life	Ineffective classroom practice and weak moral-national influence	Failure to cultivate nationally rooted educated generations
5	Administrative inconsistency in reforms	He repeatedly showed that official reforms appeared progressive in rhetoric but restrictive in implementation	Imperial educational policy was marked by contradiction, delay, and selective permission	Educational instability and frustration among reformers	Distrust toward state policy and stagnation in national education
6	Marginalization of Muslim educational initiatives	He criticized the dismissal of Muslim educational proposals as unrealistic "fantasies"	Communities that clearly needed schools and seminaries were denied equal educational development	Slow institutional growth and underdevelopment of Muslim education	Structural inequality between communities within the empire
7	Use of education as a political instrument	He viewed the language and structure of schooling as part of imperial governance rather than neutral pedagogy	Education was shaped by administrative control rather than learner-centered logic	Schools ceased to reflect the needs of students and society	Schooling became a mechanism of domination rather than development

Table 3. Rasulzade's Educational Reform Program

Reform area	Core proposal	Immediate goal	Long-term goal	Expected beneficiaries
Mother-tongue instruction	Expand instruction in Azerbaijani Turkish in schools	Improve comprehension and make education natural for learners	Strengthen national identity and cultural continuity	Students, families, teachers, society
Teacher education	Establish national Darülmüəllimins	Train teachers who know pedagogy, language, religion, and social life	Build a sustainable national education system	Future teachers, schoolchildren, educational institutions
Primary school expansion	Increase the number of primary schools in cities and villages	Broaden access to literacy and basic instruction	Raise the intellectual and civic level of the population	Rural and urban communities, children from all social backgrounds
Curriculum reform	Revise programs to include relevant knowledge, history, language, and moral instruction	Make education responsive to social needs	Create a modern yet nationally grounded curriculum	Students and school administrators
Reform of mosque schools and madrasas	Modernize traditional institutions rather than abandon them	Preserve indigenous educational structures while improving quality	Integrate religious and modern knowledge in a balanced way	Clergy, adult learners, youth, local communities
Higher religious education	Create advanced institutions for educated mollahs and religious leaders	Improve the intellectual and moral quality of clergy	Raise the cultural and ethical influence of religious figures in society	Clergy, adult population, educational networks
Educational societies	Mobilize voluntary societies to organize, support, and spread education	Strengthen public participation in educational reform	Build a culture of educational self-organization	Teachers, parents, reformers, civil society
Compulsory national-language and religious instruction	Make Turkish and religious education integral in Muslim schools	Ensure moral and linguistic formation	Prepare educated citizens rooted in their national and spiritual heritage	Muslim schoolchildren and future generations
Teacher status and salary improvements	Increase salaries and attract competent teachers	Improve quality and dignity of the teaching profession	Professionalize teaching as a socially respected field	Teachers, schools, students

Table 4. Role of the Mother Tongue in Rasulzade's Pedagogical Thought

Dimension	Role of the mother tongue	Rasulzade's argument	Educational significance	Social significance
Cognitive	Medium of understanding and internalization	Students learn more effectively when instruction begins from their natural linguistic environment	Better comprehension, clearer thinking, stronger literacy	Creates a more intellectually confident population
Cultural	Carrier of national memory and values	Language preserves traditions, customs, and inherited meanings	Curriculum becomes culturally intelligible	Protects continuity of collective identity

Moral	Means of ethical and spiritual formation	Moral education is stronger when communicated in the language of lived experience	More authentic character formation	Deepens connection to community and shared norms
Religious	Necessary for meaningful understanding of faith	Ritual language may remain, but explanation and teaching must be accessible	Reduces rote memorization and supports conscious religious understanding	Prevents separation between religion and social life
National	Core of self-recognition and self-respect	A nation cannot develop fully if its children are educated apart from their own language	Forms national consciousness and civic confidence	Strengthens national unity and dignity
Political	Field of struggle under imperial conditions	The language of education reflects relations of power, not just pedagogy	Shapes educational opportunity and institutional design	Influences cultural autonomy and resistance to assimilation
Pedagogical	Basis of effective instruction	Teaching methods work best when language, content, and student reality align	Increases teaching quality and learner participation	Helps schools serve the people rather than bureaucracy

Table 5. Educational Societies Mentioned in the Discussion and Their Functions

Name of society	Main area of activity	Contribution to education	Rasulzade's assessment	Historical importance
Nashri-Maarif	Promotion and dissemination of education	Organized educational initiatives, supported teaching and learning activities, promoted literacy and textbook use	Viewed as one of the important and active educational societies of its period	Helped institutionalize Muslim educational reform efforts
Nijat	Social and educational reform	Supported teacher congresses, courses, public education, and school-related activities	Highly appreciated for its practical and reform-oriented activity	Played a major role in organizing Muslim teachers and shaping pedagogical discussion
Safa	Educational and cultural support	Participated in the broader educational environment of Baku and the Muslim intelligentsia	Mentioned among the significant educational associations	Contributed to the civil-society dimension of educational reform
Saadat	Religious and educational reform	Prepared charters and proposals concerning madrasas, seminaries, and higher schools	Its initiatives were treated seriously by reformers but often obstructed by officials	Symbolized the desire to create institutional national education
Teacher congress organizational committees	Professional pedagogical coordination	Brought together teachers, discussed curricula, textbooks, language teaching, and reform measures	Considered highly valuable by Rasulzade	Enabled collective reflection on Muslim educational needs

Table 6. Comparison Between Imperial Schooling and the National School Ideal

Criterion	Imperial model of schooling	National school ideal in Rasulzade's thought
Primary orientation	Administrative control and political management	National development and public enlightenment

Language of instruction	Dominance of Russian and limited, controlled use of local languages	Mother tongue as the main educational medium, with other languages learned functionally
Religious instruction	Often disconnected from comprehension, taught through inaccessible forms	Taught meaningfully, in a way students can understand
Teacher profile	Technically trained but often culturally distant from the people	Professionally competent and nationally rooted
Curriculum design	Bureaucratically imposed and often politically selective	Adapted to the people's social, cultural, and historical realities
View of the learner	Subject of state policy	Future citizen and bearer of national culture
Role of school	Instrument of governance	Institution of cultural continuity, moral development, and intellectual progress
Community involvement	Limited and controlled	Encouraged through educational societies and public participation
Expected outcome	Obedient, administratively manageable subjects	Educated, nationally conscious, morally grounded citizens

Table 7. Relevance of Rasulzade's Educational Ideas for Contemporary Education Policy

Contemporary issue	Rasulzade's corresponding idea	Present-day relevance
State language policy in education	Education must be rooted in the language of the people while allowing broader civic integration	Supports strong Azerbaijani-language policy across institutions
Teacher preparation quality	Teachers must know the society, not only the syllabus	Relevant for reforming teacher education programs
Curriculum localization	Educational content should reflect national history, literature, and values	Useful for curriculum modernization without cultural loss
Moral and civic education	School must form character, not only transmit information	Important for citizenship education and value-based schooling
Religious literacy and social ethics	Religious instruction should be meaningful, informed, and socially constructive	Relevant to balanced discussions of religion, ethics, and education
Balancing globalization and identity	Modern science and national rootedness are not opposites	Highly relevant for globally competitive yet nationally grounded education
Inclusive social modernization	Intellectual progress must reach both youth and the wider population	Relevant for lifelong learning and community education
Educational equity	Unequal educational opportunities weaken society	Important for language rights, curriculum access, and regional equity

Table 8. Key Analytical Conclusions Drawn from Rasulzade's Educational Thought

No.	Analytical conclusion	Explanation
1	Education was a national question, not only a school question	Rasulzade treated schooling as central to the survival, dignity, and future of the nation
2	Language policy was inseparable from educational policy	The medium of instruction determined the depth and direction of cultural and cognitive development
3	Teacher quality was decisive	No school reform could succeed without teachers who combined competence with national-cultural understanding
4	Traditional institutions required reform, not simple rejection	Mosque schools and madrasas could become useful if modernized intelligently

5	Educational societies were essential public actors	Reform depended not only on the state but also on organized civil initiative
6	Sectarian and bureaucratic fragmentation weakened Muslim education	Divisive models served political control more than educational effectiveness
7	National schools were a practical necessity	For Rasulzade, they were not romantic ideas but realistic institutional goals
8	Modernization had to be culturally rooted	Science, progress, and competition were important, but incomplete without language, identity, and moral formation

He noted that this commission successfully organized two major meetings of Caucasian Muslim teachers in 1906 and 1907, chaired by Dr. Hasan bey and with Farhad bey Agayev serving as secretary. Rasulzade considered the benefits of these gatherings impossible to deny. They contributed directly to the educational development of Caucasian Muslims and helped shape the preparation of Turkish-language textbooks used in Muslim schools. More importantly, the congresses addressed broader questions of educational method and moral upbringing. Since teachers lived in close contact not only with children but also with their families and communities, Rasulzade believed no other social group understood the real needs of the people more deeply. This made teachers essential not only as classroom instructors but also as interpreters of public need and mediators of social progress (Rasulzade, 1915b, 1916; Ahmadov, 2006).

Relying on reports presented by Farhad bey Agayev, Rasulzade listed several achievements and proposals that had emerged from these earlier teacher congresses. Among the practical outcomes were efforts to facilitate Muslim students' admission to teacher institutes; strengthen Turkish and Sharia instruction in Transcaucasian seminaries and in secondary and primary schools; open alphabet classes for Muslim students with philanthropic support; create teacher training courses; revive teacher courses previously organized by Nashri-Maarif; establish night courses and Sunday schools through the Nijat Society; fully implement the 1881 educational program in Transcaucasian schools; appoint Muslim inspectors for primary schools; add a fourth class to Russian-Muslim primary schools; and publish books designed for the teaching of Turkish. At the same time, some proposals proved more difficult to realize, including the reform of the Arabic alphabet, the implementation of a separate holiday schedule for Muslim students, the reform of mosque schools, the preparation of textbooks for Sharia instruction, the regular convocation of Muslim teacher congresses every two years, and the creation of a general union of Muslim teachers (Rasulzade, 1915b, 1916).

For Rasulzade, the value of preserving and discussing these earlier congress decisions was not merely archival. Such records made it possible to understand what had been planned years earlier and to evaluate how much progress had actually been achieved. This historical consciousness, in turn, could guide present educational policy. He argued that Muslim representatives in the State Duma should insist that, alongside the unresolved issues, programs in secondary schools must also give serious attention to the local language and local literature, that Turkish and religious instruction should be made compulsory, and that teachers' salaries should be increased so that individuals with professional competence, dignity, and moral self-respect would be drawn into the profession.

Nationalization of the School and Education in the Mother Tongue

A central principle in Rasulzade's educational philosophy was that schools operating in Azerbaijan should be organized according to national needs and should serve national ideals. He openly stated that the most beneficial policy for any people was the nationalization of schools. This idea, he insisted, did not arise solely from patriotic sentiment or emotional attachment to the nation. It was also supported by enlightened pedagogues and educational specialists who, while valuing science above political manipulation, recognized that genuine education must be rooted in the language, culture, and psychological world of the child. Therefore, schools for Muslim children should not remain alien institutions detached from the life of the people; they should assist in nurturing the national aspirations and cultural development cherished by the enlightened part of society (Rasulzade, 1916; Ahmadov, 2006).

This principle remains strikingly relevant even today. Rasulzade's reflections on nationality in education and on the indispensable role of the mother tongue were not limited to the early twentieth century. They continue to speak to modern debates about teacher preparation, curriculum policy, national identity, and the status of the state language within education. In particular, his ideas deserve careful consideration in the training of teachers, especially specialists responsible for the teaching of the Azerbaijani language. A school system can only fully serve its society when its teachers themselves understand the historical, linguistic, and moral significance of the language they teach.

At the same time, Rasulzade's ideas suggest that educational institutions operating within the country should, as a matter of priority, be built around the state language, while in institutions using other languages, the teaching of Azerbaijani must receive special and sustained attention. Regardless of the linguistic background or age of learners, the state language

should be taught at a high level, with attention to both oral and written expression and to the full richness of linguistic usage. Such a principle is not merely administrative; it is civilizational. Language is the means through which collective memory, cultural continuity, public participation, and national consciousness are preserved and transmitted.

The Broader Purpose of Schooling

Rasulzade repeatedly argued that the function of the school is not exhausted by the simple transmission of knowledge. Schools must also educate the younger generation in a national spirit, in fidelity to their own traditions and customs, and in such a way that they do not become strangers to their own people or indifferent to the social environment in which they live. This argument reflects the broader humanistic and national dimension of his pedagogical outlook. For him, the educated person was not merely one who had mastered subjects or acquired technical competence. A truly educated individual was one who combined knowledge with cultural rootedness, moral integrity, and responsibility toward society (Rasulzade, 1915a, 1915b, 1916).

Read in this light, Rasulzade's writings offer a powerful reminder that modern education cannot be reduced to science, progress, technological innovation, international standards, competition, and methodological modernization alone. These are undoubtedly important components of contemporary education, but they are insufficient if learners become alienated from their language, values, and historical inheritance. A globally competitive educational system must also produce individuals who remain loyal to their nation, respectful of their collective identity, and capable of understanding the uniqueness of their own cultural existence among the developed peoples of the world.

In Rasulzade's vision, education should help the younger generation recognize the value of what they have inherited and develop the capacity to preserve it. At the same time, it should cultivate intellectual maturity, the ability to think logically, awareness of rights and responsibilities, and the strength to protect one's language, religion, customs, and national thought from purposeful external distortion or erosion. The result of education in a state, therefore, should be not only skilled or informed individuals, but citizens who know how to use knowledge in the service of the well-being of their people and country (Balayev, 2009; Ahmadov, 2006; Rasulzade, 1916).

This lesson, Rasulzade believed, is valid for every era. The education received by the children of any nation must provide them with worldly knowledge while simultaneously forming in them the ability and necessity to use that knowledge in ways that benefit their nation and homeland. In this sense, the ultimate purpose of education is not only intellectual development but also the cultivation of historically conscious, morally grounded, and nationally responsible human beings.

Findings

The analysis of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade's publicistic and pedagogical writings reveals several important findings regarding the structure, challenges, and reform perspectives of the educational system among Azerbaijani Muslims in the early twentieth century. His articles demonstrate that education during this period was deeply influenced by political, social, and cultural factors, particularly the educational policies of the Russian Empire. Rasulzade's reflections provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between education, language, religion, and national identity.

One of the most significant findings concerns the central role of language in education. Rasulzade consistently emphasized that the language of instruction was not merely a technical issue but a fundamental determinant of educational effectiveness and cultural continuity. He argued that children and youth could only fully understand educational material and develop intellectually when education was conducted in their mother tongue. According to him, restricting instruction in the Azerbaijani language limited students' ability to comprehend complex ideas and weakened their connection with their own cultural and national heritage. Consequently, the suppression of native-language instruction was not only an educational issue but also a political strategy that indirectly affected the preservation of national identity and intellectual autonomy.

Another important finding concerns the structure of educational institutions available to Muslim communities. Rasulzade identified several types of schools operating during his time, including traditional mosque schools and madrasas, Russian-Muslim primary and secondary schools, teacher training seminaries (*darülmüəllimin*), higher religious institutions, and schools organized by educational societies. Each of these institutions fulfilled different roles within the educational landscape. However, Rasulzade observed that most of them suffered from serious limitations, including outdated teaching methods, insufficient teacher preparation, lack of coherent curricula, and restrictions imposed by imperial educational policies.

Particularly significant in Rasulzade's analysis was the issue of teacher training. He believed that the success of any educational reform depended primarily on the competence and cultural awareness of teachers. According to his writings, many teachers trained in existing seminaries lacked sufficient knowledge of the Azerbaijani language and were unfamiliar with the social and cultural realities of the communities in which they worked. This situation created a gap between schools and society. Rasulzade therefore proposed the establishment of national teacher training institutions capable of

preparing educators who were not only pedagogically competent but also culturally and linguistically connected to the people they served.

Another key finding relates to the role of religious education and clergy in social development. Rasulzade recognized that religious figures held considerable influence within society and that their intellectual and moral qualities significantly affected the cultural level of the population. However, he also criticized the stagnation that had developed in many religious educational institutions. He argued that the lack of modern knowledge among clergy and the persistence of outdated scholastic methods prevented these institutions from fulfilling their potential as centers of intellectual and moral leadership. To address this problem, he proposed the establishment of higher religious academies where clergy could receive both religious and modern education, thereby becoming socially responsible educators capable of guiding the community toward progress.

The study also highlights the important role of educational societies in promoting learning and educational reform. Organizations such as Nashri-Maarif, Nijat, Safa, and Saadat contributed significantly to the development of Muslim education in the Caucasus. These societies organized teacher congresses, supported the publication of textbooks, established courses and schools, and attempted to improve teaching methods and curricula. Rasulzade regarded these initiatives as essential components of educational modernization because they represented the collective efforts of society rather than purely governmental initiatives.

Furthermore, Rasulzade's writings reveal a strong emphasis on the nationalization of education. He believed that schools should not remain neutral institutions detached from social realities but should actively contribute to the formation of national consciousness. In his view, education should simultaneously provide scientific knowledge and cultivate moral responsibility, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging to one's nation. He considered the development of national schools as a natural and necessary step in the intellectual and cultural evolution of Azerbaijani society.

Another significant finding concerns Rasulzade's understanding of the relationship between education and political power. His analysis demonstrates that educational policy in the Russian Empire often reflected political priorities rather than pedagogical considerations. Restrictions on mother-tongue education, the division of Muslim schools along sectarian lines, and the limited support for national educational initiatives were interpreted by Rasulzade as mechanisms of administrative control. These policies hindered the development of a coherent educational system that could meet the cultural and intellectual needs of the population.

Finally, Rasulzade's writings indicate that education was viewed not merely as an instrument of individual advancement but as a strategic factor in national development. He believed that a nation's progress depended largely on its ability to educate its youth in a manner that combined modern knowledge with cultural authenticity. For this reason, he consistently advocated reforms aimed at expanding primary education, strengthening teacher training, modernizing religious education, and increasing the use of the Azerbaijani language in schools.

Conclusion

The examination of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade's educational ideas demonstrates that he was not only a political leader and publicist but also an important thinker in the history of Azerbaijani pedagogical thought. His writings provide a comprehensive vision of education as a multidimensional process that includes intellectual development, moral formation, cultural continuity, and national self-awareness.

Rasulzade regarded education as one of the most powerful instruments for the progress and survival of a nation. According to his perspective, an effective educational system must be based on the mother tongue, connected to the cultural traditions of society, and capable of integrating modern scientific knowledge. Only such a system could produce individuals who were both intellectually competent and socially responsible.

One of the central conclusions derived from this study is that Rasulzade perceived the national school as the foundation of cultural and intellectual independence. In his view, education conducted in the native language allows individuals to fully understand scientific concepts while maintaining a strong connection with their cultural heritage. Consequently, the development of mother-tongue education was not only a pedagogical necessity but also an essential condition for national self-determination.

Another important conclusion concerns the role of teachers and educational institutions in shaping society. Rasulzade believed that teachers should possess not only professional qualifications but also deep familiarity with the language, traditions, and social values of the people. Without such cultural competence, schools risk becoming alien institutions disconnected from the life of society. Therefore, the establishment of national teacher training institutions was one of the key reforms he advocated.

The analysis also shows that Rasulzade considered religious education and the modernization of clergy to be essential components of social development. Rather than rejecting religious institutions, he proposed their reform through the

introduction of modern knowledge and improved educational programs. This approach reflects his broader belief that cultural tradition and intellectual progress should complement rather than contradict one another.

Furthermore, Rasulgade's writings underline the importance of civil society organizations, particularly educational societies, in promoting educational reform. These organizations played a crucial role in organizing teacher congresses, publishing textbooks, and expanding access to education. Their activities demonstrate that educational modernization was not solely the result of governmental policy but also the outcome of collective social initiative.

From a contemporary perspective, Rasulgade's educational philosophy remains highly relevant. In the modern era, education systems around the world face the challenge of balancing globalization, technological progress, and international competitiveness with the preservation of cultural identity and national values. Rasulgade's ideas suggest that these goals are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, a truly successful educational system must combine scientific advancement with cultural rootedness, enabling individuals to participate fully in global knowledge while remaining connected to their linguistic and historical heritage.

In conclusion, Rasulgade's reflections on education highlight the enduring importance of language, culture, and national consciousness in the educational process. His vision of a national education system based on the mother tongue, supported by qualified teachers, modern curricula, and socially responsible institutions, represents a significant contribution to the development of Azerbaijani educational thought. The relevance of his ideas continues today, reminding educators and policymakers that the ultimate purpose of education is not only the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to the intellectual, cultural, and moral development of their nation.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with accepted academic and research ethics principles. The research is based on historical and documentary analysis of published materials, including archival newspaper articles, scholarly works, and publicly available sources. No human participants, personal data, or confidential information were involved in the research process. The author confirms that all sources used in the study have been properly cited and acknowledged in the reference list. The work complies with the ethical standards of academic integrity, including honesty in data presentation, avoidance of plagiarism, and transparency in the research process.

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Conflict of Interest

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